

## The Otherwise of Art, Education, and Research

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**Abstract:** If art, education, and research always – up to some extent – put us in contact with things yet to be known, yet to be thought, what to say about this anticipation of *something* taking place, especially if this *something* ought to take place through our work? In this talk, I approach this question through a series of vignettes – ethics, politics, poetics – with the intention to trouble the direct applicability and appropriability of the otherwise unfolding from the work that we do.

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let  
night cut the question with profound  
unanswer, sustained  
echo of our unknowing.

Denise Levertov, Night of Hatchet Cove (in *The Jacob's Ladder*)

I'd like to begin this paper by going back in time, but not in place. The last (and first) time I presented here in Porto, I gave a talk titled "Radicalizing the Political Ontologies of Arts-Based and Artistic Research" at the 3rd Conference on Arts-Based Research and Artistic Research in January 2015. In that paper, I argued – drawing from Maurice Blanchot and Giorgio Agamben – that "instead of participating in a multiplication of voices *within* the existing academic framework, I see that the radical political potential of arts-based and artistic research is to introduce a corrosive silence in it; a silence that denotes an existence that is neither present nor absent" (Tervo, 2015, p. 4). By silence, I meant an approach to artistic and arts-based research aside from mere proliferation of research methods; that as researchers working with and through art, our research does not have to *save* the neoliberal university from itself by multiplying the means of control that academia has accustomed to impose on itself – means that are ultimately based on the distinction between *proper* and *improper* knowledge, and on the distinction between those who know and those who don't. While carving a *proper* place for artistic and arts-based research in the university may alleviate the precariousness of its current position, the security that this positioning provides can be seen to derive from a particular kind of entanglement of voice and presence; an entanglement that assigns the status of *proper* knowledge and its production to clearly defined processes that can be labeled, systematized, and utilized. Silence, I argued, does something else; it resists the primacy of proper places and voices by offering nothing – seemingly, at least – and thus occupying a kind of a radical no-place in the circulation of knowledge in academia.

Today, I'm less sure about the argument I made back then. This is not because I've become completely institutionalized (at least I hope that's not the case) but rather because I feel that what I called "corrosive silence" involves some important shortcomings I barely touched on in that paper. While it was certainly *not* my intention, to speak against multiplication of voices in favor of silence that is "neither present nor absent" may also sustain the existing dynamics of social power by assigning the label of *properly* radical action to those whose silence is already being heard; those individuals who wish (or have the means) to portray themselves as being able to go *beyond* representation, beyond mere signs and symbols that mark a position of speech already (or soon to be) co-opted by the hegemonic circulation of signs (for some reason, it is often cis white men like myself who seem to be attracted to such *beyond*; like to be beyond identity politics). For me, back then, the attempt to radicalize artistic and arts-based research meant to accuse others of not being radical *enough*; that those working toward specific articulations of research are missing and/or taming the *true* force of art that will always escape its own articulations (here, one can think of Heidegger's use of *aletheia*; truth as unconcealment and its relationship to art). From this perspective, rather than radicalizing politics, a call for silence (or no-place) may also sustain the division between proper and improper one wishes to undo; a policing act based on an attempt to reach for *purier* forms of making and doing uncorrupted by doings and makings of those seemingly caught up in the world of *mere signs and representations*.

The reason why I wanted to begin this talk with a reference to a paper I presented here four years ago – a paper I wrote approximately six months after getting my doctorate from the Ohio State University – is to point to a thread, a line of thinking I continue to rework in my work, sometimes with confidence, other times in deep hesitation. Indeed, as researchers, we all have our threads; skeletons giving the flesh of our scholarship its initial form and support; wells of not-knowing from which our knowing springs. My thread, a sustained interest in questions of change, transformation, and difference, has led me, in recent years, to explore further temporal aspects of history, philosophy, and politics of art education and its research. As one might guess, this interest is also weaved into the title of my talk today, "The Otherwise of Art, Education, and Research," in which my attempt will be to think through – yet again – what is it that research in arts education might be and what might it do – especially if we think, or at least I think – that it has something to do with difference, transformation, and change.

In fact, I'm very glad to do such thinking-through here, in a conference bearing the title *Encounter: Practices of Research in Arts Education*. As a word, encounter denotes a coming-together that not only makes us face something unexpected, but also involves an opposition, as the etymology of the term suggests (in + contra, according to OED). In this respect, there is something that *resists*, unexpectedly perhaps, in the encounter – a resistance from the thread itself that troubles its neat placing in the weave that our work is.

While four years ago I tried to approach this kind of resistance through the term *corrosive silence*, today I'm referring to it as *poetics of research in arts education*. This means that the *otherwise* I'm discussing here today refers to poetic encounters of resistance in

arts education research; encounters not only with each other's works, but also with our own work, our own threads.

Why poetics? To give a preliminary definition to the term – I will come back to this later in the paper – I use the term poetics in the sense of the term *poiesis* – an emergent event of making, of bringing-about through which *something* appears in this world; *something* we then *encounter*. Whereas silence may be seen to point to a *way* of doing/making (a *method*, one could say), to speak of a poetics of the otherwise in arts education research is to speak of doings/makings of research more broadly; to speak about that *something* emerging from the poiesis of art, education, and research, and how this *something* may also resist – upon encountering it – our renderings of it, leaving us not with knowledge, but with a resistance toward knowledge. As the poet Robert Duncan (2012) once noted, drawing from Stravinsky, “poetics is ‘the study of work to be done.’” (p. 271)

Here, it is perhaps worth clarifying the relation between poetry and poetics in this talk, as I will make references to some works of poetry (like Denise Levertov's words in the epigraph). Poetry is, for me, a way to think *with* poetics; with the kind of resistance I just briefly mentioned. It is certainly possible to speak about poetics without necessarily referring to works of poetry, but I see that speaking with poems about poetics helps me to make sense of it.

As I constantly find myself returning to questions of change, transformation, and difference, I'm particularly interested in the temporal aspects of that *something* emerging from poiesis, those events of *something* taking place *through* and *with* research in art education – even events when it's not clear whether *something* has actually happened or not, at least nothing one might have expected. This *something* is, one could say, a poetic resistance immanent to the ideas of change, transformation, and difference: a possibility that the idea of change might change itself.

Such immanent resistance is also, or, perhaps primarily, a challenge for educational thought today, when learning – as a way to frame change, transformation, and difference – is constantly framed as an investment, a precarious enterprise that positions the learner to a debt-like relation to the future. In this scheme, uncertainty is something to be managed, something that one can profit from, just like in a game of lottery where some win and others lose. Here, the task of the learner is to make the right kind of choices and the teacher ought to assist in this choice-making by bridging the gap between the present and the future, to fulfill the promise that debt always is. Countering (or encountering) these views calls for a poetics of educational thought in which uncertainty is not merely something to be managed (through resilience, for example) and profited from (by making *right* kind of choices), but inhabited as a time and place of not-knowing from which questions and questioning emerge. In this sense, the resistance of the otherwise, its poetics, is a question *of* and *for* education, to its time and taking-place.

A few words about the structure of this paper. Contrary to what I promised in the short abstract I crafted (I promised a series of vignettes; ethics, politics, poetics), I will focus

on unpacking the term *poetics of the otherwise* as an attempt to lay some ground to discuss the otherwise of art, education, and research. I will begin by examining the term otherwise and then move to poetics. The other terms promised in the abstract, ethics and politics, will be weaved into this discussion.

One more thing about weaving before I begin. In addition to the thread I've discussed above, this exploration contains another thread, a conceptual lineage, a series of differentiations I've recently tried to better understand in relation to the otherwise that interests me. Like this talk, this lineage begins with *silence* and ends with *something*; but it is also paired with concepts they might counter (or encounter) when following the thread further:

Silence–openness / speech–closedness  
openness–difference / closedness–sameness  
difference–authenticity / sameness–apparent  
authenticity–ontology / apparent–metaphysics  
ontology–primary / metaphysics–derivative  
primary–ethics / derivative–morals  
ethics–agency / morals–authority  
agency–affirmation / authority–negation  
affirmation–life / negation–death  
life–something / death–nothing

While certainly falling into a binary or dialectical structure – a structure that already presumes a certain kind of relation between these concepts – my point in writing out such lineage is not to present a closed system of thought. Rather, it is a series of associations on certain words I use – in this talk and elsewhere – and alludes to the theoretical landscape from which I draw, namely, the 20th century continental thought and its varied attempts to think *with* and *against* metaphysics and Law. It is a kind of a toolbox I wish to unpack and whose usage needs to be questioned, constantly. In this respect, the slash dividing the two lineages does not represent some kind of a consensus, a middle way, a synthesis. Rather, it is the otherwise I wish to encounter; it is its poetics, and its resistance.

## OTHERWISE

What, then, do I mean when I speak of the otherwise? Of course, to speak of *something* being *otherwise* always points to methodological issues: it is to speak of things done in another manner, in another way. In this regard, what I called corrosive silence can be also seen to belong to the realm of the otherwise. However, otherwise also denotes contingency: that, for example, “I’d like to thank you for inviting me to give this talk, *otherwise* I wouldn’t had written it.” Here, the otherwise does not merely concern a way of doing, but rather a perpetual possibility of otherness in the present; that things could be otherwise.

What unites these two approaches – method and contingency – is *difference*; that the present is punctured by a horizon of multiplicity that questions its coherency. This conditional element (*things could be otherwise*) makes the difference linked to the otherwise appear more potential than actual, meaning that it can be understood to belong to the realm of speculation in which the *otherwise* stands as a possibility of difference, change, and transformation.

In the fields of arts education, it is not uncommon to frame the importance of our profession through such possibility for *other kind* of learning; that it's important to have arts in schools – otherwise our students won't become fully developed individuals, as UNESCO once put it.

However, this conditional approach to the otherwise has its problems, as the possibility of difference becomes easily framed as a specific kind of difference, such as a difference between a fully developed and not-so-fully developed individuals. This is not, I believe, merely a taxonomical question, but concerns the very potentiality of the otherwise itself, or more specifically, how potentiality functions as a temporal condition. In other words, it has to do with how do we understand the *taking place* of potentiality of our work in relation to the change and transformation – or, in a word, difference – it entails.

I have been initially drawn to the philosophy of Giorgio Agamben precisely because he has spilled quite a lot of ink over the topic of potentiality. His argument (that he draws from Aristotle) that “the greatness – and also the abyss – of human potentiality is that it is first of all potential not to act, *potential for darkness*” (1999, p. 181) allows to approach the potentiality of the otherwise – the difference it carries within itself – aside from a linear passage from potentiality to actuality; that there is something in this potentiality itself that resists.

But, resists what? And why? To draw from Denise Levertov's words in the epigraph of this talk, what is at stake here is a “sustained echo of our unknowing” in that *something* that takes place *through* and *with* research in arts education. In other words, there is a resistance internal to the work we do, in its potential to “cut the question with profound unanswer” (again, from Levertov), thus keeping *with* the difference – the otherwise – it points to.

While this resistance internal to the otherwise can certainly be approached from various directions in the field of arts education research, I've recently tried to better understand what might it do for historical research in visual art education. What makes historical research an interesting context for these questions is that there the otherwise becomes often connected to historical difference; that for example, the difference between past and future makes the seemingly self-identical present lose its appearance, thus securing the flow of chronologically progressing, historical time.

Indeed, the idea that the past and the future must be essentially different from the present – that they are both horizons of the otherwise – is quite pervasive in historical research in art education (Tervo, 2017; 2018). Like in George Santayana's famous maxim – those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it – the ethics of such research is based on progression. So, thank the gods for historians, otherwise we

would be stuck in the endless cycle of the past! Here, the otherwise becomes a utopic horizon, always elsewhere, either spatially or temporally, meaning that the task of art education historians is to claim that elsewhere, make it know, and, most importantly, pave the way toward the future it promises. In the words of Michel de Certeau (1988), what is central to such “making of history” is that “*intelligibility is established through a relation with the other*; it moves (or ‘progresses’) by changing what it makes of its ‘other’—the Indian, the past, the people, the mad, the child, the Third World.” (p. 3) Or, as Rancière (1994) has put it, “the inquisitor suppresses heresy by eradicating it: he marks it, he locks it up, he kills it. The historian, on the contrary, suppresses it by giving it roots” (p. 73). From this perspective, the otherwise of historical research functions perfectly well as a colonial concept, an encounter with otherness that promises a brighter future within the contours of historically progressing time it itself establishes.

Such utopic drive for progression – fueled by a perpetual production of a place *for* difference – turns the otherwise easily into a question of ability, or to be more specific, an exceptional ability that overcomes the present in the name of a future that is *genuinely* different from the past and present. It is possible to see my earlier call for corrosive silence – as something assumedly *truly* radical, something that would go *beyond* what others are arguing for – as a search for such ability that, eventually, divides the otherwise into *authentic* and *apparent*, a distinction drawn on the basis of one’s ability to break out from the realm of appearances into something *genuinely* otherwise, from the prison house of *here and now* to the open plains of *there and then*. Not only does this offer us what Rancière (1991) has called an explicative order of education, in which the teacher (or artist or researcher) explains the *true* nature of things to those who are ignorant of it – an explanation that secures a *right* kind of transformation that learning ought to be – it also locates the otherwise of art, education, and research on a transcendental plane of time and development that only exceptional figures are able to reach; figures who, paraphrasing Santayana, *truly* remember the past and, in remembering, break out from its grip.

In the face of these possible shortcomings, I find it important to approach the potential character of the otherwise – its “sustained echo of unknowing” or “darkness” – aside from the narrative of progress. Embedded in the potential, the otherwise indeed functions at the limits of what we already know (or seem to know), bringing the unknown *within* the realm of the known. Rather than seeing the otherwise as a potentiality to be actualized for future’s sake – a missing piece in the totality of the present we must find in order to better impose a future-based control over our lives and the lives of others – it is worth turning our attention to otherwises (in the plural) *already taking place*; to otherwises that resist the history written by those in power; to otherwises not located in absent times and places, but ones that emerge and continue to emerge from the constellations of times and places that make up the present. This approach – one could call it immanent – is an attempt to mobilize the resistance embedded in the potential of things being otherwise, and, most importantly, in encounters with things being otherwise already.

What I'm trying to approximate here is the *otherness* of the otherwise; an otherness in the dark (to evoke Agamben) that is irreducible to the knowledge that lights it up. This otherness stands as difference *as such* – an openness in a system of relations that never quite settles. Or, if it settles, it settles because difference is put in the service of sameness (for example, via elevation, *Aufhebung*), in which the other is identified as a known-other and put in its proper place in the distribution of knowledge and/or dialectics of History (with capital H). This means that the otherness of the otherwise I'm interested in arts education research is not evoked as a fix in a broken system, but as a reminder of the systematic othering in the system itself; an othering based on proper places and managed relations.

This comes close to what Édouard Glissant (1997) argued in his book *Poetics of Relation* that the “thought of the Other is sterile without the other of Thought.” (p. 154), which, for him, meant that

Thought of the Other is occasionally presupposed by dominant populations, but with an utterly sovereign power, or proposed until it hurts by those under them, who set themselves free. The other of Thought is always set in motion by its confluences as a whole, in which each is changed by and changes the other. (p. 155)

Here, the change that Glissant mentioned is not, I claim, the kind of historical change that drives Time (with capital T) forward – indeed, he asks elsewhere in the book, “What is it that you are demanding when a language, one single language, would provide you with the key to progress?” (p. 103) Rather, what is at stake is an *ex*-change in which the prefix *ex*- means “to remove, expel, or relieve” (according to OED) change from progress, while simultaneously setting one in motion, or, pointing to the movement inevitable in any relation, in any *ex*-change.

In educational terms, Glissant's call for the other of Thought comes close to unlearning that removes (or expels) learning from the accumulation and organization of knowledge and/or skills based on narratives of development and fixed categories of thought. As such, unlearning is not merely a reverse of learning – a reverse that sustains the temporal ordering of education and the authority it entails – but a relation that, again quoting from Glissant, “cannot be ‘proved,’ because its totality is not approachable. But it can be imagined, conceivable in transport of thought.” (p. 174)

No horizon here, then; no exceptional ability to distinguish the authentic from the apparent. Instead, a “transport of thought” with the otherwises as they emerge in the present; and upon emerging, transform and change it.

## POETICS

If history is a record of survivors, Poetry shelters other voices.  
Susan Howe: Incloser (in *The Birth-mark*)

While I began the previous section with the question “what do I mean when I speak *of* the otherwise?”, this section will begin with similar question, only slightly modified: “what does it mean to speak the otherwise?”

Here, to speak the otherwise does not refer to some kind of an unmediated access to the difference it carries within itself; that the one who speaks the otherwise serves as a direct medium of the hidden realm of the unknown their speech uncovers (here, one can think of those who speak in tongues, or mystical, apophatic speech).

Rather, what I’m aiming at is a *relation with speech*, a relation – in Glissant’s sense – that is sensitive to the otherwise as it emerges *in, through, and with* art, education, and research. This relation is poetic as in *poiesis* that was briefly touched upon above; that is, as an emergent event of making through which *something* appears. It is worth emphasizing that this *something* does not have to automatically denote anything *new* (keeping up with the critique of historical progress rehearsed above), but a difference – or, to evoke Derrida (1984) here, a *différance* that

is not a present being, however excellent, unique, principal, or transcendent. It governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises its authority. It is not announced by any capital letter. Not only there is no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom. (pp. 21-22)

One could say, then, that a poetics of the otherwise in arts education research is that “sustained echo of unknowing” Levertov writes about, a staying-with that puts the present constantly in question and, most importantly, cuts this question “with profound unanswer” (again, Levertov). To speak the otherwise would be, then, to speak the resistance in our work; a resistance that might even “shelter” those kinds of “other voices” that Susan Howe hears in poetry.

What is, then, this resistance, its poetics? Deleuze (2007) once argued that “there is a fundamental affinity between a work of art and an act of resistance,” adding that “every act of resistance is not a work of art even though, in a certain way, it is. Every work of art is not an act of resistance, and yet, in a certain way, it is.” (pp. 327-328) This interplay between art and resistance is connected to the distinction he makes between art and communication; or to be more precise, to his view that “a work of art has nothing to do with communication. A work of art does not contain the least bit of information.” (p. 327). One could infer from this that the resistance embedded in art lies, for Deleuze, in that fact that art works with sensations (or blocks of sensations, as he calls them) rather than with “the controlled system of order-words used in a given society” (p. 327) as he defines information.

While it is possible to draw similarities between Deleuze’s treatment of the resistance embedded in the work of art and what I have been calling the poetics of otherwise, I’m also aware of the problems embedded in this comparison, especially when one throws education and research in the mix. To discard questions relating to communication and information in arts education research – through a recourse to silence, for example – is to discard, or, in psychoanalytical terms, *to repress*, encounters with intricacies of communication and information that education and research always make us face. Or, it



may also turn the question of resistance *in* and *of* art merely into a question of communication and miscommunication. Indeed, to see poetic language (or language of poetry) as a figural language that purposely obscures the *real*, literal meaning of what one wants to say (here, can think of rejection of mystical, apophatic speech in certain branches of theology), assumes that there is a possibility of pure communication, of a language that truly means what it says and says what it means. Rather than approaching poetics of the otherwise through this quarrel between the figural and the literal, I see that its resistance is elsewhere, in the very event of plunging into research and education.

Here, we are approaching something central to the title of this talk, “The Otherwise of Art, Education, and Research,” these words listed together, separated by commas, united in resistance. Keeping in mind Deleuze’s claim that “no one needs philosophy to think” (p. 318), I could say, provocatively, that arts education research does not necessarily need Art (with capital A) to speak its otherwise, to go *beyond* its present articulations toward articulations yet to come (as some Deleuzians like to see it). What it needs, perhaps (if *need* is even an adequate term here), is a sustained attention to its own sense-making; to the order-words, the order of words, and the word orders through which arts education speaks, or through which one speaks of arts education, and speaks it. (note: this is, initially, what I attempted to do, in a certain way, with lineage of concepts presented in the beginning, hoping that its order of words may also speak its otherwise; that the order itself becomes other)

What I mean by sustained attention is something akin to what I find resonating in a passage by Robert Duncan (2012): “We made in a poem a place for the syllable to occur as it did not occur in the careless rush of speech.” (p. 272) With the help of Duncan’s words, it is possible to readjust the practice of place-making that de Certeau finds so problematic in historiography; that there is always a place *proper* for the other in the economy of the same. Indeed, what Duncan is describing here is an event of poesis in which he works not with totalities (that is, words, sentences, narratives), but with parts (syllables), with units of words always in relation to other units and their soundings. Yes, his poetics is not necessarily about communication (to follow Deleuze), but composition, or com-position: the act of positioning parts together in a time that differs from the normal order of things. Like with ex-change discussed above, there is an inherent movement in this place-making, as com-position is not stable, it does not *prove* anything except *difference*, a perpetual change and transformation.

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To close the threads that I’ve been weaving in this paper, let me end with a few words of speculation. Indeed, what might it mean for researchers in arts education to work through the kind of attention to parts one finds from Duncan? The difficulty that arises when making this comparison is, of course, that while poets work with language, researchers in arts education work with events of art and education as they take place through encounters with education and art (encounters seen at large: in making, experiencing, etc.). So, what are *our* units, *our* syllables? Are they the kind of blocks of sensation specific to one’s profession following Deleuze? If so, what are these

sensations? Or, alternatively, are they units of voices sheltered in the dark (to link Howe with Agamben), units that speak the resistance in our work? Would this require something seemingly mystical akin to what poet and scholar Anne Carson (1999) wrote how the Greek lyric poet Simonides comprehended “the profoundest of poetic experiences: that of *not* seeing what *is* there” (p. 62)? If so, what is it in our work that is *not there*?

Whatever is the case, my sense is that these units are not necessarily units of time (like lessons), but *in* time. To find out what this could mean, this *time*, might require “a study of work to be done” (as Duncan and Stravinsky had it), a work of poetics.

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